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SUBJECT: NATIONAL JOCKEYING FOR MUTHANNA'S NEW LEADERSHIP

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[B](#). B. BAGHDAD 2816  
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Classified By: Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for Reas  
ons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Muthanna reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: National political parties intervened in the selection of the replacement to the assassinated Governor of Muthanna. Their motives differed, but all agreed on the need to choose a new leader quickly, to mitigate any instability from a leadership vacuum. The result was a marriage of convenience between Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq/Badr and the Albu Hassan tribe, culminating in the selection of Ahmed Marzook Al-Salal from the Albu Hassan as Governor and the Supreme Council,s Abdul Hussein Al- Dhalimi as head of the Provincial Council. The Zayadi slate was the temporary loser, but for the upcoming elections it remains well-positioned to capitalize on citizens, frustration with the corrupt governing elite. End Summary.

A Matter of National Concern  
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[1](#)3. (S/REL MNF-I) The contest to succeed the assassinated Muhammad Ali al-Hassani as Governor of Muthanna vaulted the province onto the national stage. From Hassani,s assassination on August 20, 2007 until Ahmed Marzook al-Salal,s selection as governor and Abdul Hussein al-Dhalimi,s selection as Provincial Council (PC) Chairman on August 30, the national leaders of the major Shiite parties were in continuous contact with provincial factions, trying to orchestrate the jockeying for power occurring at the local level. And though each party had its own agenda, the common denominator from Baghdad was &choose the new leadership QUICKLY.8 All parties realized that delay risked destabilizing the province. (Comment: Local PRT employees witnessed first-hand the exchanges described in this cable. End Comment.).

The ISCI/Badr ) Albu Hassan Alliance of Convenience  
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[1](#)4. (C) Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)/Badr found itself in a precarious position. Its paramount concern was to preserve its grip on the highest offices of the province. But the death of Hassani left the party without a commanding leader in Muthanna. The only two remaining party members on the Provincial Council (PC) who could conceivably run for higher office - Abdul Hussein al-Dhalimi and Qassim Hassan Auda - were weak by comparison. Neither had the tribal backing necessary to win the governorship; Dhalimi was not even originally from Muthanna. Thus, Hadi al-Amiri, acting on behalf of ISCI/Badr,s national leadership in Baghdad, authorized and then helped orchestrate an alliance of

convenience with Ahmed Marzook,s Albu Hassan faction. Marzook, with the largesse and the threat of violence wielded by his Albu Hassan tribe, would become Governor with the help of ISCI/Badr votes, in exchange for which Abdul Hussein al-Dhalimi would assume the chairmanship of the PC. ISCI/Badr also bribed PC members where necessary. The deal was strengthened by its obvious symmetry: Hassani,s tribe and, more generally, the city of Rumaytha, retained the governorship, while ISCI/Badr preserved its hold on high office.

¶5. (C) Having formed an alliance for their run at power, the Albu Hassan-ISCI/Badr alliance very cleverly undermined support for Dr. Falih and the Zayadi faction (reftel). Our first-hand sources report that substantial bribes were paid to secure the services of two nominal independents on the PC, Qassim Jabr and Hadi Jabr, who used their reputations for neutrality to peddle carrots and sticks to other swing voters. This combination of threats and inducements allowed them to snatch two key votes from the core Zayadi constituency - Deputy PC Chairman Jassim Shirread and former PC Chairman and religious cleric Sheikh Assad al-Dhuwayni. The latter was told, &We will bury the outstanding corruption charges against you, and pay you 50 million Iraqi dinar.8 (Comment: No doubt, that was said without irony. End Comment.).

Jumping on the Bandwagon  
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¶6. (C) With the defection of Jassim Shirread and Sheikh Assad to the Marzook-Dhalimi ticket, the imminent defeat of the Zayadi faction was obvious. By the evening of August 29, PC members who had been warily hedging their bets stamped

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to join the winning side. Dr. Falih withdrew his candidacy to avoid having to resign as Director General of Health to enter officially on the ballot, and it appeared that Marzook and Dhalimi would run unopposed. However, the leadership of Da,wa Tanzhim al-Iraq intervened, with Khalid al-Asadi ordering former PC Chairman Kareem Ali Sajeet to spoil the unanimous victory. The awkward result was that Sajeet, who had banished himself from PC business to protest corruption in early 2006, now swept back onto the scene to nominate himself for Governor, collect six symbolic protest votes, and then disappear again twelve hours later. (Comment: The motivation for Asadi,s spoiling action may be that Marzook was elected in 2005 on the Da,wa Tanzhim ticket, but has since abandoned the party to pursue his own ambitions. End Comment.).

¶7. (C) Not to be left out, Fadhila,s spiritual guide Sheikh Mohamed al-Yaqubi issued a pseudo-fatwa endorsing &the wise choice8 for Muthanna,s governor. This was interpreted by PC members originally elected to their positions on the Fadhila ticket to mean that each could vote as they saw fit. (Comment: As none of these PC members have retained any meaningful loyalty to Fadhila or Yaqubi, its &marja,8 (source of emulation), Yaqubi,s ruling can best be understood as an alibi to align himself with the inevitable. End Comment.) It is unknown whether national Da,wa al-Islamiya leadership involved itself in the election, but local Da,wa Islamiya figures connived with the Zayadi faction. There is no evidence of any Sadrist role in the process. (Comment: Since early 2006 and the transfer of provincial Iraqi control, the Sadrists have been unable to establish an effective political presence in Muthanna. End Comment.)

The Cleverest of Them All  
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¶7. (C) COMMENT: Notwithstanding their loss in the election, the Zayadi faction may well emerge the overall winner. The Albu Hassan-ISCI/Badr coalition employed

controversial tactics to secure their victory, and in so doing sacrificed their already less-than-lustrous reputations for lame duck positions atop a provincial government up for reelection. The people of Muthanna are growing tired of these backroom deals and bribes and blame the Islamic parties for their wretched state, a refrain echoed in Karbala and other southern provinces recently. In Muthanna, tribally-backed opponents of the Islamic parties ) principally the Zayadi faction ) have positioned themselves to ride this sentiment to victory in the upcoming provincial elections. END COMMENT.

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